IN THE CLAIMS

1.   (Previously Presented) A method for awarding bonuses over a gaming network having a plurality of gaming machines interconnected by a network, the method comprising the steps of:

allowing play to occur on a plurality of gaming machines;

setting an upper threshold;

accumulating a bonus pool responsive to play on the gaming machines;

selecting a first subset of the plurality of gaming machines when the accumulated bonus pool crosses the upper threshold;

sending a bonus token signal to at least one of the first selected subset of the plurality of gaming machines;

storing the bonus token signal at the at least one of the first selected subset of the plurality of gaming machines over the bonus period; and

initiating a bonus period at only the at least one of the first selected subset of gaming machines responsive to the bonus token signal.

2.   (Original) The method of claim 1, further including the step of paying out bonus awards from the bonus pool during the bonus period.

3.   (Original) The method of claim 2, further including the steps of:

decrementing the bonus awards paid during the bonus period from the bonus pool to yield an adjusted bonus pool amount;

setting a lower threshold;

removing the bonus token signal from the first selected subset of gaming machines when the adjusted bonus pool amount crosses the lower threshold; and

ending the bonus period contemporaneous with the step of removing the bonus token signal.

4.   (Original) The method of claim 1 further including the steps of:

accumulating a temporary bonus pool during the bonus period responsive to play of the gaming machines during the bonus period; and

transferring the temporary bonus pool into the bonus pool at the end of the bonus period.

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5.   (Original) The method of claim 4 wherein the step of accumulating the temporary bonus pool during the bonus period responsive to play of the gaming machines during the bonus period excludes those machines in the first subset of gaming machines.

6.   (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein the first selected subset of machines is a number greater than one.

7.   (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, further including the steps of:
removing the bonus token signal from the first selected subset of gaming machines;
ending the bonus period contemporaneous with the step of removing the bonus token signal from the first selected subset of gaming machines;
selecting a second subset of gaming machines;
receiving the bonus token signal at the second subset of gaming machines; and
initiating a bonus period at only at least one of the second selected subset of gaming machines responsive to the bonus token signal.

8.   (Original) The method of claim 1, further including the step of reserving the bonus token at a bonus server coupled to the network until the first threshold is crossed.

9.   (Previously Presented) A gaming machine network comprising:
a plurality of gaming machines, each of said machines having a machine control interface adapted to operate said gaming machine in either a normal operation mode or a bonus operation mode;
a bonus server linked to the plurality of gaming machines over a network, said bonus server including selection means for identifying at least a selected one of the plurality of gaming machines and signal generation means for generating a bonus token signal;
signal transmission means for sending the bonus token signal to the machine control interface of at least the selected one of the plurality of gaming machines responsive to the selection means, wherein the selected one of the plurality of gaming machines switches from the normal operation mode to the bonus operation mode responsive to the bonus token signal being received at the machine control interface; and
storage means adapted to store the bonus token signal at the gaming machine during an entire period of operation in the bonus operation mode.

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10.   (Original) The gaming machine network of claim 9, further comprising:

a player server linked to the plurality of gaming machines, said player server including a database of player accounts;

player account identification means located at each of the plurality of gaming machines for identifying a player, associated with a respective player account stored within the player server, at the selected one of the plurality of gaming machines;

means for sending a flag signal to the player server responsive to the bonus token; and

means for flagging the respective player account responsive to the flag signal.

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